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## BOOK REVIEWS

**The road from Mont Pèlerin: the making of the neoliberal thought collective**, edited by Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2009, 480 pp., \$55/£40.95/€49.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-0674033184

In recent decades, neoliberalism has remade the world in its own image, unfettering markets, expanding and deepening their reach, and culminating in the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. But what exactly is neoliberalism, and how did it rise to prominence? Is neoliberalism monolithic, reducible to a few core precepts? Is it the same as the Washington Consensus and neoclassical economic orthodoxy? Readers seeking answers to these and other questions, indeed anyone with an interest in neoliberalism should read this excellent collection of essays.

To this day, many observers, including academics, think that neoliberals are Americans (rather than Europeans) who adhere to neoclassical economic orthodoxy, are anti-statist, favor unfettered market competition, and are universally and dogmatically opposed to trade unions. Moreover, it is thought that there is universal agreement among neoliberals concerning these key tenets. But in fact, as the contributors show, this is not the case. As Dieter Plehwe remarks in his Introduction, ‘neoliberalism is anything but a succinct, clearly defined political philosophy’ (p. 1). The volume presents a highly nuanced intellectual history of the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) in regard to a number of different countries and issue areas. Plehwe points out that neoliberalism ‘needs to be thought of as plural in terms of both political philosophy and political practice’ (p. 2). The contributors shy away from blanket definitions of neoliberalism, viewing it instead through the analytical lens of a ‘thought collective’ and a ‘transnational discourse community’ spanning ‘academia, the media, politics, and business’ (pp. 5, 22).

The neoliberal thought collective refers to the more than 1000 members and close affiliates of the MPS, which was founded in 1947 near Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland. The authors view the MPS as the innermost circle of neoliberalism. As Philip Mirowski puts it (p. 428):

We focus empirically on the central core membership that has consciously developed the neoliberal identity for more than sixty years now. If the target person or group bore any links to the Mont Pèlerin Society since 1947, directly or at one remove, then we count them as falling squarely within the purview of the neoliberal thought collective.

This approach may frustrate readers seeking simple definitions and clear-cut models that fit on a series of three by five cards. But the methodological device of the thought collective has distinct advantages: it allows the authors to do justice to the complex and nuanced history of the neoliberal thought collective in a number of different issue areas.

To give an overview, the volume is framed by two weighty contributions, an introduction by Dieter Plehwe and a postface by Philip Mirowski. Individual chapters cover the following 11 topics: French neoliberalism (by François Denord); British neoliberalism (by

Keith Tribe); German neoliberalism (by Ralf Ptak); the 'Rise of the Chicago School of Economics and the Birth of Neoliberalism' (by Rob van Horn and Philip Mirowski); 'Neoliberals Confront the Trade Unions' (by Yves Steiner); 'Reinventing Monopoly and the Role of Corporations: The Roots of Chicago Law and Economics' (by Rob van Horn); the 'Origins of the Neoliberal Development Discourse' (by Dieter Plehwe); 'Business Conservatives and the MPS' (by Kim Phillips-Fein); 'The Influence of Neoliberals in Chile before, during, and after Pinochet' (by Karin Fischer); 'Taking Aim at the New International Economic Order' (by Jennifer Bair); and 'How Neoliberalism Makes its World: The Urban Property Rights Project in Peru' (by Timothy Mitchell).

The volume's contributors make heavy use of original archival materials and make good on the editors' promise to expose the complexity, nuance and plurality of neoliberal thought – a belief system that has constructed and re-constructed itself and the world. Within neoliberalism, there are Friedmanite and Hayekian wings, followers of the Chicago and Austrian schools, and German ordoliberals. Steiner shows that Hayek's radical disavowal of trade unions was not a neoliberal consensus position during the 1940s and 1950s, but represented an extreme pole of opinion that became mainstream over time. Politics and power are persistent themes in neoliberalism. Far from straightforward anti-statists, according to Mirowski and other contributors, the neoliberals' 'central tenet' was, as Hayek saw it, that 'a strong state was necessary to neutralize . . . the pathologies of democracy' (p. 443). Indeed, a theme of the volume is neoliberalism's antidemocratic tendencies. Rob von Horn recounts the rise of the Chicago law and economics view of monopoly as a benign phenomenon. Neoliberal thought shaped interests, but it was also shaped by them: for example by powerful business donors that shaped neoliberal doctrine regarding monopolies. Mirowski draws attention to Hayek's double-truth doctrine, a double standard consisting of one set of justifications for the initiated guardians of the market and another for the public. Deviations from orthodoxy are tolerated as a matter of expediency. Although neoliberalism proves less doctrinaire than one might expect in this respect, there is no doubt what is subordinated when democracy and the market conflict. Neoliberalism is inextricably political. It is about who has power in society.

Underlying the volume is an understanding of the power of discourse (*cf.* Fischer 2003) and a subtle, but unmistakable spirit of neo-Gramscian critique. This critique is incisive in the volume's individual contributions, in which authors take aim at specific MPS doctrines and initiatives. Yet I do not believe that the critique exerts as much force as it might on the MPS and neoliberalism, taken as a whole. To advance this cause, it may be necessary to rise above the critiques of the MPS articulated in this volume to engage in the general, prescriptive debate about the role of markets in egalitarian politics. With its exacting contribution to the intellectual history of the MPS, this book contributes towards that end, along with a notable monograph on the history of the Mont Pèlerin Society by Bernhard Walpen (2004) and a volume edited by Plehwe, Walpen and Neunhöffer (2006). In a footnote in his Introduction, Plehwe remarks that 'I do regard this introduction as being co-authored with Bernhard even if it does not formally carry his name' (p. 36). Those with a reading knowledge of German will find Walpen's monograph an indispensable supplement to this volume, a foundational guide to neoliberalism in general and the Mont Pèlerin Society in particular. Critique aside, the quality of the contributions in *The Road from Mont Pèlerin* stands on its own, so the volume will be valuable even for readers who do not share the authors' theoretical or normative orientations.

The book's argument could be expanded in a number of ways. I find the author's claim of the performativity of neoliberalism compelling: neoliberalism has con-

structed a world in its own image. In Mitchell's words, economics 'is sometimes able to use the world as a laboratory'; economics 'organizes the world in a way that provided neoliberal economics with the opportunity to produce its facts' (pp. 388, 401). But the book's insight that economics is inextricably political and its high-quality intellectual history do not preclude a systematic assessment of the reach and impact of the neoliberal thought collective/MPS network and related think tanks. The authors and collaborators may seek to do this in future. Another extension would involve comparing the influence of the neoliberal thought collective in a variety of academic disciplines. Much is known about economics; what about the other social sciences, humanities and sciences?

In conclusion, the implications of this volume for critics of neoliberalism are as disquieting as they are important. For example, one might posit that neoliberalism is implicated in the current financial debacle. But as the volume points out, neoliberalism is pluralistic, heterogeneous, and dynamic, like capitalism itself. Thus, neoliberalism generates resources within itself to diagnose the weaknesses which led to the current collapse and to propose an antidote to them. To provide one example: the New Social Market Initiative, an employer-funded neoliberal reform initiative in Germany (see Kinderman 2005), posted a large-scale advertisement on Wall Street in 2009, advocating the Social Market Economy – a German, ordoliberal-inspired variant of neoliberalism – as an antidote to America's liberalization-induced ailments. As Plehwe notes, these and many other neoliberals are 'hard at work to overcome whatever midlife crisis the neoliberal thought collective may face' (p. 34). *The Road from Mont Pèlerin* is indispensable for anyone wishing to gain an understanding of neoliberalism, whether as an end in itself or as a means for constructing alternative, non-neoliberal futures.

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**Political ethnography: what immersion contributes to the study of politics**, edited by Edward Schatz, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2009, 361 pp., ISBN 978 0226736778

With contributions mainly by experienced political scientists based in North America, this volume shows the struggles, merits and results of political ethnography. Not too long ago, others argued for interpretive-ethnographic research into government elites (Rhodes *et al.* 2007) and a sociological view of political ethnography (Joseph *et al.* 2007). In *Critical Policy Studies* ethnographic fieldwork has also been promoted (Dubois 2009, van Hulst 2008). The sophisticated volume under review enriches this growing literature.

The people I have talked with about my previous research usually associate ethnography with fieldwork, and more particularly with participant observation. And as Edward Schatz states in his introduction, the ethnographer ‘must be “neck-deep” in a research context to generate knowledge based on that context’ (p. 5). No surprise there. But there is more to ethnography than that.

In this volume, a second meaning of ethnography is highlighted: ethnography as a sensibility (see also, Pader 2006). Ethnography as a sensibility asks the researcher ‘to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality’ (p. 5). It means that research is centered on people’s worldviews. In a sense, this broadens ethnography to include various sorts and aspects of interpretive research besides and beyond participant observation. Instead of focusing solely on issues such as the exact duration of the fieldwork and the degree of participation in an effort to distinguish real ethnographers from ‘wannabees’, the concept of ethnographic sensibility highlights the importance of the way researchers get involved in and with the context under study. Ethnographic research is as much about the way researchers engage the field as it is about the use of certain methods and techniques to do so. The risk of reframing ethnography in this way is that one’s feeling of sympathy for people in the field (and perhaps one’s having heard of Clifford Geertz) might come to mean one is doing ethnography. This, however, is not what Schatz and his collaborators seem to be after.

Schatz’s opening chapter informs the reader of the debates that the contributors of the volume had among themselves. He points at different views of the proper epistemology, of the role of the researcher, and of ethnography’s place in the study of politics. The contributors do, however, agree on the value of immersing oneself in the context under study. In the three more theoretically oriented chapters in the first part of the book, Jan Kubik, Jessica Allina-Pisano and Lisa Wedeen elaborate on and argue for realist or interpretive approaches to ethnography – without, however, really pressing the reader to choose between them.

The second part, with chapters by Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh, Elisabeth Jean Wood and Timothy Pachirat, is more personal. It contains ‘confessional’ insights into the way the research process can help the researcher to understand the researched context. The third part of the book, containing chapters by Katherine Cramer Walsh, Michael G. Schatzberg, Cédric Jourde, and Lorraine Bayard de Volo, focuses on the usefulness of studying a certain topic or context – public opinion, sorcery, politics in West Africa, Nicaraguan resistance and US casinos – from an ethnographic perspective.

The final part starts with an overview of, and an agenda for, ethnographic research in Latin America, written by Enrique Desmond Arias. This part also leaves room for criticism from those who believe that (interpretive) ethnography is not engaged enough. According to Corey Shdaimah, Roland Stahl and Stanford F. Schram, it is not the (often) theory-driven interpretive ethnography, but problem-driven research that can really benefit those in need. Before Schatz concludes the volume, Dvora Yanow offers the reader important insights into the way interpretive ethnography *as a text* can persuasively represent fieldwork.

If one is looking for new methods and techniques for doing fieldwork, this is not the book to pick up. At the same time, the methodological issue of reflexivity in field research does have a prominent place in this book, without it leading to obsessive, philosophical self-observation. What happens to the researcher, various contributions show, can be important for understanding the field. Pachirat’s chapter on working in a slaughterhouse is probably the best example of this. What one might miss in the volume are descriptions of civil servants and political leaders in action in their bureaucratic contexts. But then again, much recent literature already supplies us with these.

It is mostly the idea of getting closer to people at the margins of politics, to those who are regarded as the objects of policy making, that is promoted here. What makes this volume a very good read is the variety in the contributions. The authors bring various views of ethnography, personal research histories and an interesting cast of characters from the field that one would not often get to know in 361 pages. But at the same time, the contributions complement one another. The various chapters add up to a view of what political ethnography is or could be. The chapters together complete the puzzle, or, as the interpretivists would perhaps rather hear, form a colorful mosaic. Overall, the arguments for doing political ethnography are not in short supply in this volume, while neither criticism nor debate is far away. In sum, if this volume does not convince the reader of the value of political ethnography as critical research, I very much doubt another would.

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**Global climate change impacts in the United States: a state of knowledge report from the US Global Change Research Program**, edited by Thomas R. Karl, Jerry M. Melillo and Thomas C. Peterson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 192 pp., ISBN 978-0521144070

This report by an expert team of scientists operating under the Federal Advisory Committee Act summarizes the science of climate change and the impacts of climate change on the United States. It does not reflect academic debates about climate policy but focuses on empirical evidence of climate change within the territory of the United States of America. As a result, it discusses climate change impacts by sector in the first half of the book and then focuses on regional climate change impacts in the second half of the book. Its aim is to better inform public and private decision making at all levels.

In doing so, the report draws a gloomy picture of where we stand as human society and where we are going. The key findings of the report suggest that global warming is unequivocal and primarily human-induced. There is strong evidence that climate change is underway and that its impacts are going to get stronger and more obvious as time passes. Climate change will have an impact on virtually all economic sectors, stress water resources, radically affect agricultural production and threaten coastal areas. Society needs to react by adopting mitigating and adapting strategies in order to minimize the damage

caused by global warming. These strategies need to be adopted now or the social and economic costs to society are going to be immense.

To cite an example of what issues are addressed in this book, the chapter on human health focuses on a variety of issues caused or exacerbated by global warming, such as increases in risk of illness and death relating to extreme heat, urban air quality, extreme weather, diseases transmitted by food, water and insects, and the demographics of health-related impacts. These discussions and trend projections are supported by data on pollutant emissions, temperature, spread of vector-borne diseases, etc. Most individuals interested in climate policy in the US will have encountered these data before in some form or other but this book provides an excellent source as a concentrated, well-documented and comprehensive presentation of the research on climate change in the US.

There are no policy recommendations or implications to be gleaned from what is presented but the book provides a good summary for the citizen who wants to become more familiar with the scientific studies from the major scientific institutions. The hope of the authors is that scientifically informed citizens will become active stakeholders and bring about positive change. In the light of the controversy in the climate change epistemic community over last year's leaked emails, this hope may well be misplaced and it is difficult to see how this report would sway climate skeptics jaded by the attempts to discredit climate change science. Nevertheless, this report is exactly the place where any citizen wanting to make up their own mind should start.

In sum, this book is designed for the informed lay person rather than policy makers or academics. As such it offers a wealth of data and evidence to suggest what the challenges and perils of climate change are going to be in the US. However, the book does not discuss policy options or address the difficulties the US political system faces in addressing climate change. This is not the remit of the book and there are other sources that address these issues to which this book would be a good compendium.

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